

COMMEMORATING EVENTS:

THE *VICTORIA SOSIBII* IN STATIUS, *SILVAE* 4.3*

Statius' encomium in praise of the new Via Domitiana from Sinuessa to Puteoli and its builder, the emperor Domitian (*Silvae* 4.3), is exceedingly rich in intertextual references. In a brief footnote, Smolenaars has recently mentioned two features, observed by A. Ambühl, that Callimachus' *Victoria Sosibii* (fr. 384 Pf.) shares with Statius' poem the reference to the river Kinyps in line 24 (cf. Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.90) and the fact that Callimachus uses the Nile as his spokesman in the same way as Statius the Volturnus. Both, she says, point to Callimachus' poem as a source for Statius'.¹ I would like to further this view by exploring other possible links. Most importantly, I hope not only to show that Statius' poem borrows and adapts a couple more details from Callimachus than have been observed so far, but also that the entire structure of his poem echoes that of Callimachus' famous victory song.

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The talking river is surely the most striking parallel between Callimachus and Statius. But this is far more than a formal coincidence and occurs in a remarkably similar framework. In both cases they embody the region of which they are the main watercourse, the Nile being the

* I am most grateful to Paolo Fedeli, Ortwin Knorr and to the anonymous CQ referee for their careful reading and suggestions, to Charles Burnett and to Barry Taylor for revising my English, and to Elisabeth Hasse for unparalleled friendship.

¹ J. J. L. Smolenaars, 'Ideology and poetics along the Via Domitiana: Statius *Silvae* 4.3', in R. Nauta (ed.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden, 2006), 233, n. 17: 'There is more of Callimachus in this poem. As Annemarie Ambuehl kindly pointed out to me, his "Victoria Sosibii" (fr. 384 Pf.) may well be one of Statius' sources here; in line 24 Kinyps is mentioned and also here a river (the Nile) is spokesman.'

voice of Egypt and the Volturnus speaking for the vast southern territory, the Campania, now crossed by the new road. Moreover, both utter a thanksgiving speech: the Nile thanks Sosibius² for honouring their common homeland with his athletic achievements, whereas Volturnus thanks the Emperor for having improved him as a consequence of the road's construction. As substitute speakers³ they are distancing devices, while at the same time they enable some variation in the eulogy's utterance, including direct speech eulogy. Furthermore, their addressees enjoy a divine status, obvious in the case of athletic winners and, as far as Domitian is concerned, clearly stressed by way of attributes and by his repeated identification with Jupiter.⁴ So Statius did not just restore the talking river motif; he gave his river the same symbolic task as the river in Callimachus and also made it the vehicle for conveying a message of praise for a divine man.

² His identity, which plays an important part in dating the poem, cannot be clearly established. Recent scholarship favours Ptolemy IV Philopator's minister, who was probably involved in the murder of Berenice II. For a complete survey of the problem with bibliography see T. Fuhrer, *Die Auseinandersetzung mit den Chorlyrikern in den Epinikien des Kallimachos* (Basel/ Kassel, 1992), 144-9. See also more recently F. Nisetich, *The Poems of Callimachus* (Oxford, 2001), 168.

³ See F. Cairns, 'Speaker-variation', in id., *Generic Composition in Greek and Latin Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1972), 177-217, at 216-17. On speeches in the *Silvae* see also the useful collection of information in H.-H. van Dam, *Statius: Silvae book II* (Leiden, 1984), 507-8.

⁴ This is particularly clear in *Silv.* 4.3.128-9 'en! hic est deus, hunc iubet beatis/ pro se Iuppiter imperare terris'; 139 'salve, dux hominum et parens deorum'; 160-1 'donec Troicus ignis et renatae/ Tarpeius pater intonabit aulae'. See Smolenaars (n. 1) at 224, 235, n. 21 and R. R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden, 2002), 328-9, 331-2.

Now substitute speakers are by no means rare in the *Silvae*.⁵ But there is more to it here. The talking river is part of a larger strategy of voice variation, an innovative procedure that does not occur in the other Callimachean victory songs we know.⁶ The noteworthy point here is that this variation in voice becomes the structuring principle in both poems. I think it possible that Statius is experimenting with Callimachus' innovative design in a praise context. Though the *Victoria Sosibii* has come down to us in fragmentary state, at least four voices can be distinguished, beside the poet's. The first lines are voiced by the poet (...-28); then the Nile takes his place (28-34). A lacuna follows, and Sosibius is probably the next speaker (35-41).⁷ An unknown man (maybe an Argive)⁸ is the subsequent voice (44-5). Another intervention from the poet takes place (46-9), followed by the inscribed gift which Sosibius voted to the gods (50). Finally, the poet also praises the winner in the final lines (53-...). An effort towards a symmetrical arrangement in which the poet's voice alternates with other speakers seems obvious, even though *lacunae* prevent us from further conclusions.⁹

Interestingly, we find a similar architecture in *Via Domitiana*, or, at least, a similar variation scheme in a similar praise context. After a first section narrated by the poet (1-71), Volturnus is the orator (72-94). Another narrative segment follows (95-123) and introduces

⁵ See K. M. Coleman, *Statius: Silvae IV* (London, 1998 [first ed. Oxford, 1988]), 65.

⁶ Nisetich (n. 2), 292.

⁷ I follow Fuhrer (n. 2), 156-61 and Nisetich (n. 2), 170. A. Barigazzi ('L'epinicio per Sosibio di Callimaco', *PP* 6 [1951], 410-26, at 416) defends the idea that in lines 35-43 Nile is still the speaker.

⁸ This hypothesis is suggested by Fuhrer (n. 2), 190 and Nisetich (n. 2), 170.

⁹ For a detailed presentation of the poem's structure see Fuhrer (n. 2), 149-71 and, by the same author, 'Callimachus' Epinician Poems', in M. A. Harder, R. F. Regtuit, G. C. Wakker (edd.), *Callimachus* (Groningen, 1993), 79-97, at 81, 95-6.

the last speaker, the Cumaean Sibyl (124-63). She embodies her city and congratulates her benefactor. What is more, in her sacred cave at Cumae, she represents the end of the new road (114 'fine... imo') and the remotest place from Rome's viewpoint. Noticeably, the same applies to Callimachus' last substitute speaker, the gift which Sosibius voted to Hera. The poet says he saw it 'where the Nile's farthest foot is set' (48-9),¹⁰ a feature most likely referring to a sanctuary not far from the easternmost mouth of the river,¹¹ that is, the remotest from Alexandria. Thus the Latin poem's structure seems to reproduce, though on a minor scale, that of Callimachus'.¹²

Another link between Callimachus and Statius exists as well. The Nile is proud to state that now, ennobled by Sosibius' victories, he can stand proud among the feeble Greek rivers, which previously used to surpass him in fame (*Victoria Sosibii* 32-4). In Nisetich's words, 'the point seems to be that the Nile, so much greater in size than any of the rivers in Greece, has been inferior to them in glory until now.'¹³ Bearing this in mind, it is very interesting to examine the comparison Voltumnus makes of himself to other rivers (4.3.88-94). Building the road involved major works that improved his muddy, voluminous, and impassable conditions; he thus became a clear and pure water stream (92 'nitente cursu', 94 'puro gurgite') with well-defined margins. From such waters any Callimachean would certainly like to have a drink.

¹⁰ I quote Nisetich's translation ([n. 2], 171).

¹¹ For parallels and bibliography see Fuhrer (n. 2), 165 (esp. n. 637), 166; Pfeiffer *ad loc.*

¹² Barigazzi (n. 7), 416-17 could have presented Statius' poem as an argument in favor of his understanding of the structure of *Victoria Sosibii*. He maintained that it comprised only two direct speeches (Nile and Neptune), which is the case in *Silv.* 4.3 (Voltumnus and Sibyl).

¹³ Nisetich (n. 2), 291. See also Fuhrer (n. 9), 94: '...he has come for the first time to the fame justly due him in contrast with the smaller, but much more famous (presumably Greek) rivers...'.

One cannot fail to recognize a poetical alignment in Voltumnus' self-characterization in opposition to heavy Bagrada (88 'puluereum grauemque caeno'). That is to say, Statius is recasting the productive distinction between the muddy river and the clear spring (notice the disjunction 'ne... sed', 88, 92), with its well-known generic implications.¹⁴ This is enhanced by the 'Calimachean resonance' of the adjective *turbidus* (76), which Voltumnus employs to characterize his pre-Domitianic condition, 'suggesting the negative connotations of *turba* and multitude'.¹⁵ Now Voltumnus already enjoyed a place in literature before Statius, but a quite humble one. He had been sung of in epic by Vergil, Ovid and Lucan as no more than a geographic feature devoid of any literary relevance: *Aen.* 7.728-9 'amnisque uadosi... Volturni', *Met.* 15.714 'multamque trahens sub gurgite harenam', *Luc.* 2.423 'Vulturnusque celer'.¹⁶ Predictably, Voltumnus' portrayal of himself in the past agrees with his depiction in epic, Ovid's line being particularly suggestive. But even if 'puro gurgite' (94) and the image of the Tyrrhenian sea washing against Voltumnus 'laden with mud'¹⁷ (88-9) was not intended to hint at Ovid, it makes clear the sharp contrast between 'then' and 'now'. The river's modest epic existence emphasizes how far Statius, as a poet, has taken him – and, simultaneously, how far Domitian, as a builder, has granted him to rise. So Voltumnus does not vie with the great epic rivers; also this is not the kind of poetic challenge Statius is aiming at. Voltumnus is proud to state that his new shape makes it possible for him to rival delicate Liris (94

¹⁴ It echoes in particular the 'Hymn to Apollo', 105-12. See Smolenaars (n. 1), 231-3; B. Gibson, 'The nature of the *Silvae*', in id., *Statius: Silvae 5* (Oxford, 2006), xviii-xxx, esp. xxvi; C. E. Newlands, 'Building the imperial highway: *Silvae* 4.3', in id., *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 284-325, esp. 299-300, 306-9.

¹⁵ See Gibson (n. 14), xxvi.

¹⁶ See also *Sil.* 12.521-2 'Vulturna citata... uada', *Claud. carm.* 1.256 'Vulturnusque rapax'.

¹⁷ I quote Coleman's translation ([n. 5], p. 17).

‘prouocare Lirim’), a river whose lyric qualities made him famous.¹⁸ Moreover, Domitian’s bridge makes it possible for him to be crossed, like the small Greek rivers (*Silvae* 4.3.78, *Victoria Sosibii* 33-4). Now the Nile owes his glory to his praised addressee, just as Volturnus – he is very clear about it – owes his shape and thus his fame to the Emperor. In a word, the rivers’ speeches share the following features: (i) they compare themselves to minor rivers which possess a certain status they envy; (ii) they show themselves indebted to their addressees, whom they praise by stressing how much their action has changed them and raised their status.

But why is Volturnus famous now? In my opinion, this happens because it is now possible to sing of him in lyric poetry, where, for the first time, also he is allowed to sing. His new qualities have made him a lyric river, bestowing on him the literary distinction only a pure stream may enjoy and, what is more, the finest literary voice, the lyric voice. And this is ultimately Domitian’s deed, although through Statius’ poem.

To return to the structure of the two poems once more, Fuhrer thinks that there are two related traditions at work in the *Victoria Sosibii*, the epinikion and the victory epigram. Furthermore, it is possible to see ‘independent short poems’ in its several sections. She states ‘one of these is identifiable as dedicatory and probably also victory epigram, and the speeches of the Nile and of Sosibius show at least elements common to this genre’.¹⁹ This is particularly relevant when one is tracing Callimachus in *Via Domitiana*, because it applies, in my opinion, to Volturnus’ speech. It can be envisaged as an independent poem, namely a miniature exercise in the dedicatory epigram, whose recurrent topics it displays. Volturnus

¹⁸ Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.31.7-8 (with R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book I* [Oxford, 2001 revised], 352-3), 3.17.7-8, Luc. 2.423-6, Sil. 4.348-50, 8.399-401. See also Coleman (n. 5), 126.

¹⁹ Fuhrer (n. 9), 96.

refers to his former appearance (4.3.73-4, 76-7, 79-80) in comparison to the new one (78, 80); he accounts for the building works that transformed him (75, 85-7, 88-94); the river contrasts his former uselessness to his present usefulness, now that he is crossed by a bridge (78); finally, he compares himself to other rivers (88-94).²⁰ Also epigraphic allusion in the river's speech strengthens its connection with epigram: by alluding to an actual inscription (83-4), Volturnus turns to be an inscribed river both outside and within the poem.²¹

Statius' dependence on the *Victoria Sosibii* may also shed light on a textual problem posed by his allusion to the river Kinyps in 4.3.90-91 'qualis Cinyphius tacente ripa/ Poenos Bagrada serpit inter agros'. M offers this text, which had never been challenged until Coleman's 1988 edition. Yet as early as 1898, Vollmer had already stressed the oddity of qualifying 'Bagrada' by referring to another river, and strikingly a less known one. Moreover, to interpret 'Cinyphius' as a synonym to 'Libycus',²² a solution still adopted in recent commentaries, fails to explain Statius' choice of this particular adjective, which is 'hier nicht

²⁰ See A. Lóio, 'De rio lamacento a corrente cristalina: a transformação do espaço e da paisagem em *Silvas* 4.3', in F. Oliveira, C. Teixeira, P. B. Dias (edd.), *Espaços e Paisagens: Antiguidade Clássica e Heranças Contemporâneas. I* (Coimbra, 2009), 207-14, at 209-10. On *Silv.* 3.1 as an *anathematikon* see A. Hardie, 'Silvae 3.1. The Anathematikon and the Ceremony of Dedication', in id., *Statius and the Silvae* (Liverpool, 1983), 125-64; G. Laguna, *Estacio, Silvas III* (Sevilla, 1992), 119-27.

²¹ See the discussion in K. M. Coleman, 'Stones in the Forest: Epigraphic Allusion in the *Silvae*', in J. J. L. Smolenaars, H.-J. van Dam and R. Nauta (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden, 2008), 18-43, at 41-2.

²² This is the case in Verg. *G.* 3.312 (see R. A. B. Mynors, *Georgics* [Oxford, 1990], 229) and Ov. *Met.* 15.755; see Coleman (n. 5) 126. The adjective also occurs in Ov. *Met.* 5.124, 7.272, *Pont.* 2.7.25. For further examples see ThLL, s.v. 'Cinyps', 452, lines 41-62.

gerade passend'.²³ Aware of this problem, Coleman proposed to read the adjective as a qualifier to 'agros' and found 'Poenus' a natural match to 'Bagrada', which 'can be appropriately called *Poenus* because it was the major river near Carthage'.²⁴ In addition, fearing that the distance between noun and adjective could be held against this conjecture, she defended her reading by pointing out parallels to the achieved word order elsewhere in Statius. Now I think there are further arguments to support this correction. Kinyps' rare occurrence in ancient literature, in addition to the links between the *Victoria Sosibii* and *Via Domitiana* uncovered above, make it highly probable that Statius had Callimachus' passage in mind. If this is the case, he most certainly aimed at referring to the lands surrounding the Kinyps mentioned by Callimachus, Ἀλεξάνδρου τε ... γῆν ἐπὶ καὶ ναίων Κίνυφι (23-4). Now that is best rendered by 'Cinyphios... inter agros'. Furthermore, in the resultant reading, the word order is not a problem, but an artistic achievement. It allows chiasmus in linking 'Cinyphios' with 'agros' and 'Poenus' with 'Bagrada', and also word picture, since 'Poenus Bagrada' crawls along ('serpit') between ('inter') the words 'Cinyphios' and 'agros', just as the river slowly winds its way through the Cinyphian fields. In fact, the snake-like movement of the river is even imitated by the phalaecean rhythm of the two lines, which starts out slow, with three heavy syllables and then speeds up a little, and finally alternates between long and short syllables, just like a snake whose arching body moves up and down.²⁵ Such stylistic resources are surely consistent with a Callimachean's claim to *virtuosismo*.

²³ F. Vollmer, *Silvarum libri* (Leipzig, 1898), 450-60, at 458.

²⁴ Coleman (n. 5), 126.

²⁵ I owe this stylistic observation to Ortwin Knorr, who also noticed that 'Libycae sonant cateruae' in *Silv.* 4.3.4 is possibly reminiscent of the Ἀσβύστης ἵππος in *Victoria Sosibii* 5-6, all the more because in both cases the imagery also involves sound.

To conclude, Statius' allusion to the epinikion's Egyptian setting fits the widely held interest in Egypt during the Flavian era. The Flavian rulers supported the Egyptian cults.²⁶ Domitian, in particular, appeared especially fond of things Egyptian. For example, Domitian built a huge complex of Egyptian temples on the Campus Martius, dedicated to Isis and Serapis and decorated with marbles and reliefs in Egyptian style. The emperor's obelisk, engraved with Pharaonic titles applied to him, may have served as a center-piece of this complex.²⁷

²⁶ See M. Malaise, 'Les dieux égyptiens protecteurs des Flaviens', in id., *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie* (Leiden, 1972), 407-17.

²⁷ See Newlands (n. 14), 11-13 and R. H. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and architecture: a study of Flavian Rome* (Bruxelles, 1996), 145-53.